

The Bayou Observer



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National Weather Service Office
NWSFO New Orleans/Baton Rouge
<http://www.srh.noaa.gov/lix/>

Serving South Mississippi
&
Southeast Louisiana

Hurricane Camille, 40 Years Later

Shawn O'neil

As the fortieth anniversary of Hurricane Camille approaches this summer, we thought it would be fitting to take a look back at the storm that until Katrina was the standard everyone on the Gulf Coast measured other hurricanes by.

Camille formed from a tropical wave about 500 miles south of Miami, Florida, and within 24 hours, was already a small, but very powerful hurricane in the Caribbean Sea. Camille made landfall near Pinar Del Rio, Cuba on August 15, 1969 and entered the Gulf of Mexico the same day. By the next day, the sustained winds in

Camille had reached 150 miles per hour (mph) and the storm was centered about 380 miles south of Fort Walton, Florida. On Sunday afternoon, August 17, 1969, Camille was located 200 miles southeast of New Orleans and had become the second most intense hurricane in recorded history in the Atlantic Ocean with a central pressure of 901 millibars or 26.63 inches of mercury.

By Sunday evening, Camille was already bearing down on the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Mississippi and by 7:00 PM, the Weather Bureau office in Boothville was reporting winds gusts over 100 mph. Around midnight, Camille moved inland near Bay St. Louis, Mississippi bringing wind gusts estimated near 200 mph. The wind speeds associated with Camille can only be estimated because every wind recording instrument within her path was destroyed. Near and just to the east of the center of the storm, tides ran as high as 30 feet above normal, causing catastrophic damage to the Gulf Coast of Mississippi.

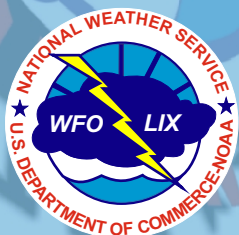
Even as Hurricane Camille weakened into a tropical storm and later a tropical depression, the storm continued to wreak havoc. In parts of Virginia, near the Appalachian Mountains, Camille caused rainfall amounts that exceeded 30 inches in isolated areas. Some of the worst flooding in over a century occurred in the area as did numerous mudslides. This was an important lesson in that hurricanes can cause damage far away from the coastline which it strikes.



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LIX in the Community

Phil Grigsby and Danielle Manning

WFO LIX has participated in several outreach activities since the last edition of the Bayou Observer was published. In late February, Ken Graham (whom you met in our Spring 2009 Edition) participated in the Southeastern Coastal and Atmospheric Process Symposium at the University of South Alabama. Along with other NWS employees, he participated in a panel discussion concerning the future of operational meteorology. He also met with several students to discuss resumé and interview preparation.

Toward the end of March, representatives from WFO LIX helped staff the NOAA booth at the National Science Teachers Association Conference held at the Morial Convention Center in New Orleans. Over 1000 teachers visited the booth to learn more about using NOAA data effectively in the classroom. The centerpiece of the exhibit was NOAA's Science on a Sphere a 6 ft sphere on which satellite data, model data, and several other types of atmospheric or oceanographic data can be projected for impressive visualization. In addition to these two events, WFO LIX, along with the Lower Mississippi River Forecast Center, participated in Public Service Recognition Week during the first week of May. The week culminated with a major outreach event taking place at Lakeside Mall in Metairie on Thursday May 7th. Both agencies staffed a booth handing out informational brochures and sponsoring activities such as a hurricane bean bag toss for children. A major focus was placed on hurricane preparedness...with the hurricane brochures and hurricane tracking maps proving very popular.



NWS forecaster Danielle Manning (center) poses for a picture with Angella Sallis (of the National Coastal Data Development Center, Left) and Dr. Lightning at the NSTA convention in New Orleans.



Picture 1 - Teachers at the NSTA convention "hold the whole world in their hands" using NOAA's Science on a Sphere.



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Hurricane Camille, 40 Years Later

The final toll Camille took on the United States was staggering. Camille claimed 256 lives between her initial impacts on the Gulf Coast and the flooding in the Appalachians. The estimated damage toll was near \$1.5 billion dollars in 1969, which when converted to today's dollar would be near \$9 billion. (2008 dollars)

Even though Camille has been surpassed in strength and lore on the Gulf Coast due to the landfall of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, it will always be remembered as one of the worst natural disasters to ever strike the United States.

LIX in the Community NWS Open House

Danielle Manning



Final preparation of the outdoor booths before the Open House.

On Saturday, May 16, the National Weather Service New Orleans/Baton Rouge Forecast office, in conjunction with the Lower Mississippi River Forecast Center held its first ever Public Open House. Total attendance is estimated at around 550-600 people with around 350 people touring our office that day, and another 200-250 opting to spend all of their time visiting outdoor booths sponsored by our partners.

Guests who chose to tour the office were greeted by two separate tornado simulators set up in the lobby of the office. NWS employees were on hand to answer any questions about the simulators or about tornadoes in general. Presentations in the operations area of both the Weather Forecast Office and the River Forecast Center described the daily duties of NWS employees. Some guests were even able to watch a forecaster issue a live Severe Thunderstorm Warning! The tour was a huge hit with our guests and several even participated in more than one tour, learning something new each time.

Several of our partners sponsored outdoor booths and provided additional information to our guests.

Representatives from two of our NOAA partners at Stennis Space Center attended the event and worked booths. Volunteers from the Northern Gulf Institute helped children make fish rubbings, while a representative from the National Data Buoy Center stood beside a 3-meter buoy to answer questions. FEMA, The Army Corps of Engineers, The Red Cross, and our local HAM Radio Operators also manned booths and handed out information about emergency preparedness and safety. Additionally, representatives from the Community Collaborative Rain Hail and Snow Network were on hand at their booth, ready to recruit volunteers to join the network (www.cocorahs.org) and the St. Tammany Sheriff's Office and St. Tammany 911 even brought a Mobile Command Center for people to tour!



Guests watched as a weather balloon is launched.

By far the most popular attraction (excluding the office tour) was the Hahnville Volunteer Fire Department's Fire Safety Trailer affectionately known as the "tornado trailer" for our event. Guests were allowed inside of the trailer where they were given safety instructions concerning what to do in the event of a tornado. Just as the presenters finished giving the instructions, the alarms sounded indicating a tornado warning had been issued. The trailer began to shake and guests were expected to use the safety tips they had just learned. Both children and adults alike had a blast and many waited in line more than once to enjoy the experience!

Our own employees manned booths and helped with outdoor activities as well. Several brochures were available for the taking including hurricane tracking charts, hurricane informational brochures, and flood safety brochures. Children also loved our Coke bottle tornadoes and took turns trying to toss bean bags through the eye of a spinning wooden hurricane. Guests were also treated to a special weather balloon launch around noon. NWS employees explained the importance of the "balloon observations" and then released one (along with the attached instrument) to travel up the atmosphere.



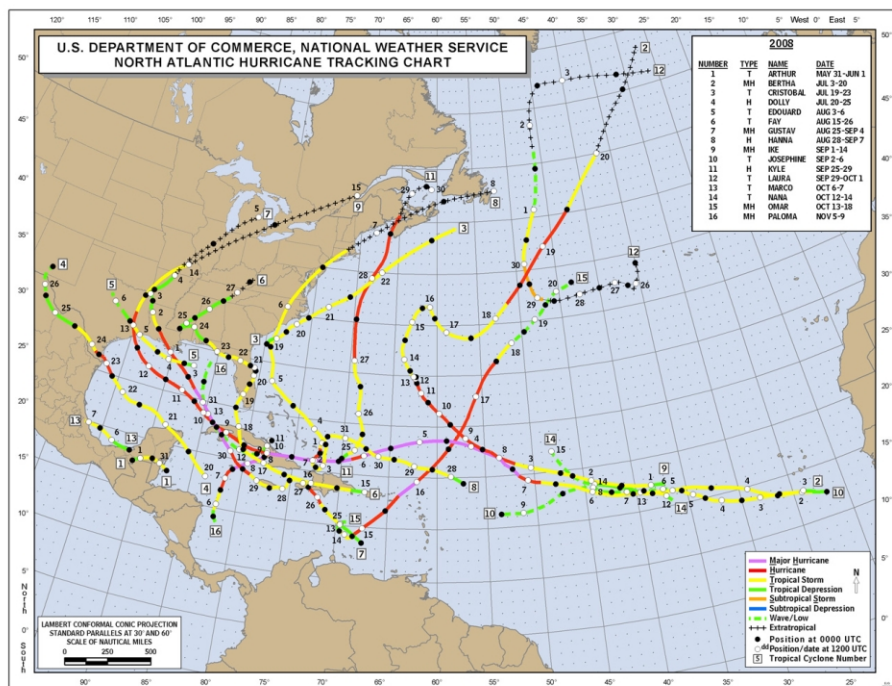
Guests listen attentively during a tour of the NWS operations area.

We'd like to thank all of our partners who participated in the event and helped make it such a success, and we hope to see you all at our next Open House (hopefully to be held the same weekend as the Slidell Air Show in October of 2010).

Hurricane Climatology and Outlook

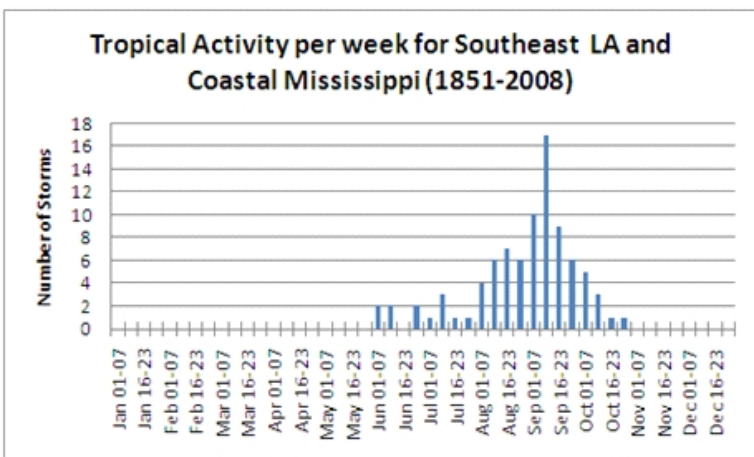
Danielle Manning

Ask anyone who lives within 500 miles of the Gulf Coast or Atlantic Seaboard when hurricane season starts, and they'll tell you June 1st. Ask them if they know when the basin-wide climatological peak of hurricane season is and they'll probably be able to tell you it's the second week of September. But, ask them when the local climatological peak is, and they might not know the answer. That's because every stretch of coastline is a little bit different and the climatological peak of activity for one place may not be the same as for another place. For instance, the local climatological peak of activity for the Tampa Bay area is the second week of October a full month after the basin-wide peak. But before revealing the answer for Southeast Louisiana and Coastal Mississippi, let's take a look at the basin-wide statistics.



As previously mentioned, the basin-wide peak of hurricane season is the second week of September. Have you ever wondered why? As it turns out, the timing has to do with what's called the "lag of the seasons" over the ocean. Basically, the ocean temperatures are usually warmest during the second week of September, and since hurricanes thrive off of warm water, it makes sense that more of them would form during the warmest part of the year (with respect to the ocean).

But how many storms can we expect? In a typical hurricane season, there are 10 named storms, 6 hurricanes, and 2 major hurricanes. In any given season, this number will be dependent on several different factors such as sea surface temperatures, the number of African Easterly Waves traversing the basin, prevailing wind shear conditions, the state of the El Nino Southern Oscillation, and so on and so forth. Taking all of these factors into consideration for the 2009 hurricane season, NOAA scientists are forecasting a "near normal" season this year with 9-14 named storms, 4-7 hurricanes and 1-3 major hurricanes. Don't be fooled by the term "near normal," however. Remember that "inactive" and "normal" seasons can also produce multiple land-falling storms, and it only takes a single storm affecting your house to make it a busy (or "bad") season. For this reason, regardless of the forecast activity, you get a game plan and prepare now.



Getting back to the original question... When is a hurricane most likely to strike Southeast Louisiana or Coastal Mississippi? As it turns out, the local peak in activity is exactly the same as the basin-wide peak the second week of September, and we've NEVER seen a hurricane (or tropical storm) make landfall in the area outside of the official hurricane season.

